

Interviewee: Bozena Dudek
Interviewer: Chrystal Cavallaro
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Abstract: Bozena Dudek was born in 1957 in Krakow, Poland and immigrated to Worcester with her family when she was 10 years old. One of eight children, Bozena discusses the challenges her mother faced in raising the family, buying their first house, and adapting to life in a new country. She discusses her mother's life growing up in Poland where she was orphaned at an early age and had to work to care for her siblings. Bozena reflects upon the difficulties of learning a new language and how that influenced her opportunities in Worcester. She also touches upon the pain of leaving behind friends and family in Poland. Bozena discusses her work as a Certified Nurses Associate (CNA) and what it means to her to be able to care for elderly and sick people. Bozena tell us that, as a young woman, she had wanted to become a nurse but now feels that it is too late for her to return to college. Bozena also talks briefly about her own children and the importance of quality education in their lives.

CC: Where and when were you born?

BD: I was born in Dabrowa Tarnowska (Krakow), Poland ...1957.

CC: Tell me about you family?

BD: Five sisters, two brothers, mother and father.

CC: What kind of work were they in primarily?

BD: Um...my father as in...in this country, he was working for Table Talk Pie. My mother worked in Saint Vincent's Hospital. He was a dishwasher.

CC: Did you grow up in Worcester?

BD: Ah, we came from Poland 1967, and we came to Worcester, Mass. We lived here all our lives. We lived here in ah, 30 years.

CC: Wow...that was pretty interesting. In what neighborhood, did you grow up in?

BD: Off of um... Vernon Hill Park. And mostly people were there were Polish, French and Lithuanian, so, you know, it was a nice neighborhood.

CC: So the neighborhood um...generally nice, like the people were nice to get along with?

BD: Yeah, the people were easy to get along, friendly...and...

CC: Did you go over their houses for dinner?

BD: *No*, because you know no one really didn't do that. (laughs).

CC: (laughs) Where did you live in the City now? On Vernon street?

BD: I live ... off of Vernon street.

CC: Have you lived in multiple areas, or you live there ... your whole entire life?

BD: Ah...we lived actually on Dorchester Street for about five years, and then we bought a house on Ames Street.

CC: Do other family members live in the area?

BD: Um...some lived in...in Millbury, Mass a...I lived in Worcester and my brother Worcester, Mass. And a have one sister that lives in Colorado. So they kind of spread a little bit, but we are all together.

CC: Aww a big happy family. Did you receive your education in Worcester?

BD: Yes.

CC: Where and when if you did attend college, did you study?

BD: I didn't ah...attend college, because I got married when I was 19 years old. And then I had my own family and...so I didn't go to college but I just went to become a CNA...for nursing. And...that what I'm doing now for about 12 years.

CC: Do you have hobbies or do you have any regular leisure activities that you take outside of the home?

BD: I like to dance. Ah...and...and go to Bingo. But...shopping, going to movies with my children, dinner, and...you know, I guess that's it for now (laughs).

CC: (laughs) If you worked outside of the home for wages, where did you begin working? And what did you do?

BD: The question that you just asked me is—when I was young I suppose...well, I went to school when I was 17 years old, did part time at work. Ah...work in the Saint

Vincent's Hospital because the hospital was very close to where we lived—five to ten minutes away. So it was convenient...and when I got older, I did full time jobs.

CC: So how did you learn to do the work?

BD: How I learned to do the work is...by people showing you the job. You know, when you go to the job they orientate you. They will teach you, and you go for you classes. I went for a couple, two/three months for classes to become a CNA. To get ah...registered.

CC: So what does um...explain briefly what a CNA? Like what does it stand for?

BD: Um...CNA is a Certified Nursing Associate, but also they now they call us PCA's. So now we—Patient Care Associate—and...we work with a nurse.

CC: So basically you kind of do volunteer work?

BD: No I don't do volunteer work. I don't have time. I have 3 children and I need to work and ah...so I don't do any volunteer.

CC: What led you to join what you are doing now? In this organization? To be a CNA. Why?

BD: To be a CNA, I like to pick that cause I like to ...be with older people and...like to help older people. Because someday, I said to myself, I will be old and like the new generation to take care of me. And I'm doing that right now.

CC: So basically their main goals is to help everybody else um...basically recuperate, just like rehabilitation. Okay that is very interesting, um...so want to talk about why you impact on Worcester? How does Worcester impact on you?

BD: I impact Worcester by helping the elderly and the sick at the hospital even though I doesn't have a degree. I think...people should care for one another...when they have something troubling them or something is wrong physically and mentally. Worcester impacts me to be a better person like ah...a mother and raising a family here in America, and near good schools for education.

CC: How did you get through tough times?

BD: Ah...through tough times we went through—when my parents lived...they would lent us money, and...so we would have to pay the big interest and at that time, everything was lower because that was over 30 years ago. And not like now, 200 years ago; everything is expensive. Um...so it's actually, you know, my parents...what happened to us to get what we got.

CC: That's good. My family does the same thing. Tell me about your family—children, husband, if any nieces and nephews?

BD: Um...I have three children. The oldest is Michael. He is 25. He went to a parochial school, kindergarten through 12th grade. Then he went to college—Holy Cross. He was a very good student and he got some scholarships. He studied very hard and he graduated. Now he is a teacher at Saint Mary's High School. He teaches seventh through eighth grade and ah...that's it on him. I have a middle daughter, her name is Annette. She is—she also went to Saint Mary's School from kindergarten to 12th grade, and she graduated from there. She went to college, to Saint Joseph's College of Maine. Ah...she graduated in 4 years and now she's...she is a case manager. She is like almost me, and she cares for old people. Ah...so everything will be ok. Stephanie is my youngest and she also went Saint Mary's from kindergarten and to 12th grade. She graduated from there, and she went to Worcester State College in Worcester. This is her second year ah...in school and her thinking about medical field. She wants to be a speech therapist or a nurse; she didn't decide yet. I hope she will decide soon, thank you.

CC: (laughs) What type of work does your husband do?

BD: My husband does...he is an...he used to be a blacksmith for over 20 years. Then ah...he was...or his work was slow. So he went to other work. It's called Read, he does, he is a...he operates a operator, and he's been there for a few years. He likes it...yeah.

CC: Anything else you want to include in this interview? Like anymore...anything else you want to discuss about yourself that I don't know?

BD: I was, I was younger, and (laughs) I'm 48 and...always wanted to be a nurse but ah...

CC: Ever think about going back to college?

BD: I think it's too late for me. That's how I feel, you know. It's your brain doesn't work the same when younger and ah...with the language it's a little harder for me. But at least I'm working in with the medical...and ah...nurses aid and enjoy working with people, sick people, helping them out. And ...but if I was younger, I will probably want to be a nurse. You have better...we get more money you know better about medical.

CC: So you didn't actually tell me your husband's name?

BD: Oh...I'm sorry. His name is Adam Dudek. He's born ... 1957, and ah...We, you know, life goes quick and fast. It's remember that I was just a little girl and now I'm ah...older woman. My children are out of college, so you can see that you'll getting older.

CC: Is that all you want to talk about, I mean...

BD: I think that's ah...think it's that I have...

CC: Do you want to talk about your sisters, your siblings...as opposed to your sisters, who you share a close relationship with?

BD: Ah...my younger sister, she is in Colorado. She is in the army; now she is in Texas, and she will be there for a few years. So she is the only girl in the army. Ah...and we are pretty close, the other sisters pretty close. We do things, you know, try to go to movies, just to get out of the house. Ah...and ah...forget the problems at home. (laughs)

CC: And...

BD: And ah...I have another sister I don't see much; she always work, and work. She is a business woman, so she always busy and ah...and I guess that's it. And I have 2 brothers. I'm close to my older, Stanley. He's like...53 years old and ah... I was pretty close with him even when I was a young girl, like you know tell him something and he will give you that advice.

CC: (laughs)

BD: So ah...you know, you get someone like that in the family. Sometimes you can not trust outside people, because they laugh at you and ah...they think it's, you know, no good you do; you do trust your family more. Yeah.

CC: God, that's a good answer!

BD: Yeah.

CC: Talk to me more about your mom and family?

BD: My mom is oh...86 years old, she is still living. She's not doing so well, but she doing that bad yet. She has ah...mild dementia and she, you know, has problems walking. She went through a few operations on her. She had two total replacements and other operations. And...when she was younger she, like I said, had to ah...support her children. She had eight children and...we were all small when we came to this country, so we all kind of... Who could work, it was working and whatever that pays came in, gave it to my mother, so she could put all the paychecks together. And she, you know saved the money to buy a house. Because nobody wanted eight children...on an apartment because the kids are jumping too much.

CC: Too much huh?

BD: Yeah, too much noise. She tried—I think we buy the house in five years and ah...we had some to pay. But it was really fast and we were happy we had own place; nobody could kick us out. And ah...she...let me see.... What can I say about her? She had a tough you know life. She was a little girl, her mom died when she was five years old. Her

mom had pneumonia and her father later died couple years, so she was like by herself, with all her siblings. She had to do everything around the house—help with the children, ah...you know, cook. Everything was scratch, no cans. Ah...macaroni, she had to make by hand and then the bread, then... I mean everything ...Take care of the farm, milk the cows and every morning at 6 o'clock, and go in the field and do other things. So it was, you know, a lot of work. But everybody was happy we didn't have to rush. You know, you did whatever you could do, come home and eat, and start again—and supper and stuff like that. It was ...as I remember 10 years ago the—I had to watch the cows and make sure they didn't go to different fields. I had to watch them, and...you know, everyone had a job. I think the kids and—in Europe when they were on a farm, or even in city—they are more mature. Like my sister was five years old and she had to watch me because I was too little. So, I mean today nobody would leave a kid five years old would...a baby, you know. So it was different, like...nobody was afraid that something would happen. It was, you know, nice and then when we came to America we had to start all over, and...and...

CC: Was it a big difference for you to come all the way from Poland to Worcester? To leave everything—like your family, like your homeland—and come to a place where it's totally strange to you?

BD: Well it was...I mainly didn't like it when I come here. I was ah...I didn't know the language. It took me awhile to learn English language...and I wanted to go home to see my friends and, you know, your neighbors and stuff. After a while, you know, years went by...you got used to...this country. I went later to see my country with my parents and to remind everybody names and who you went to school with. So it was nice, but...you know, everybody loves America cause you ah...

CC: God bless!

BD: It's a free country you know ah...yeah God bless! 'Cause when we came, my country was Poland, was still communist. I was near—I'm from Krakow—where the Pope was from. And...so it was, it was nice.

CC: Bozena, I want to thank you for doing this interview with me and I hope everybody else that will be hearing this—or I will be discussing my presentation in front of my urban studies class will—gladly know a lot about you. Thank you very much!

BD: Thank you!